

...that Uighur Muslims experience some of the most severe religious freedom restrictions in China. In response to July 5, 2009 demonstrations that broke out after Uighur and Han Chinese men clashed in a factory dispute, the Chinese government expanded its efforts to curtail "religious extremism, separatism, and terrorism." Religious freedom conditions in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR), where the majority of Uighur's live, are worse now than any time in the past decade.

Chinese officials view independent Uighur religious activities as evidence of "extremism" and prohibit outward manifestations of Islamic piety among students and government employees. Women are penalized for wearing veils as are parents who allow their minor children to attend mosques. Uighur Muslims continued to serve prison sentences for engaging in independent religious activity. In the last year, at least 36 Uighurs were sentenced to prison terms on charges related to their religious activities. Qahar Mensur and Muhemmed Tursun continue to serve three-year terms for allegedly distributing "illegal religious publications." In addition, thousands remain jailed on "extremism" charges who have not been provided with the right of due process or legal representation.

China's active repression of Uighur religion and culture may be counterproductive, leading to the very type of extremism Beijing's policies allegedly are trying to forestall. In June, anger over indiscriminate police raids have boiled over into violence. Forty people reportedly have died in clashes between groups of Uighur youth and police. Chinese media claims that the violence is stirred by "terrorist elements."

China must allow for open and independent investigations of their claims of Uighur terrorism. Until there is transparency in the Chinese government's treatment of Uighur Muslims, the international community should continue to press for rights protections consistent with China's

own Constitution and its obligations under international human rights covenants. See USCIRF's 2013 [Annual Report](#) for more information about Uighur Muslims.